A Polycrystalline Silicon Diode String for ESD Protection of Different Power Supply Connections

Background of the Invention

Field of the Invention

This invention relates to circuits coupled to an integrated circuit that provides protection from electrostatic discharge (ESD) events. More particularly, this invention relates to circuits that will prevent a differential voltage level between two different power supply voltage terminals from exceeding a specified voltage level and thus prevent damage to the integrated circuit.

Description of Related Art

Integrated circuits often have either multiple terminals connected to a single power supply voltage source or multiple isolated power supply voltage sources. The power supply voltage sources are connected through separate distribution networks to the internal integrated circuits. The structure of the internal integrated circuits may have a core logic section and a peripheral logic section. In order to isolate noise, such as caused by simultaneous switching of driver circuits in the peripheral logic section or impedance mismatch on transmission line connected to an input/output (I/O) pad, the peripheral logic section would have a separate power supply

distribution network from that of the core logic section. Similarly, the internal circuits may include analog circuits requiring multiple power supply voltage sources and need to be isolated from the core logic and peripheral logic section to prevent conduction of noise to the analog circuits.

5 [0003] While the core logic section and the peripheral logic section often have a common power supply voltage source, it is not uncommon for the core logic section to have a power supply voltage source of a different voltage level than the peripheral logic section. For instance, the peripheral logic section may have a power supply voltage source of 5.0V and the core logic section may have a power supply voltage source of 3.3V. It is further common that the analog section require even different voltage levels than the core logic section or the peripheral logic section. Further, the internal integrated circuits may have implementations with multiple core logic sections, multiple peripheral logic sections, and multiple analog core sections. Each section will have a separate voltage distribution network for the power source and return paths.

[0004] An ESD event is commonly a pulse of a very high voltage typically of several kilovolts with a moderate current of a few amperes for a short period, typically about 100 nanoseconds. The common source of an ESD event is bringing the integrated circuit in contact with a human body or a machine such as an integrated circuit tester and handler.

15

20

If an I/O pad is contacted and subjected to an ESD event, the power supply distribution network of the peripheral logic section connected to the I/O pad begins to change relative to the voltage level of the power supply voltage source connected to the core logic section. This change can cause damage in subcircuits that form an interface between the core logic section and the peripheral logic section. Fig. 1 illustrates a structure of the prior art of a voltage clamping circuit employed to prevent damage between the distribution networks of two separate power supply voltage sources. The structure of Fig. 1 illustrates a two-staged voltage clamping circuit, which may be expanded by the addition of more stages.

[0006] A substrate has the distribution networks **55** and **60** to connect the separate power supplies **V**_{sup1} and **V**_{sup2} to the internal circuitry **65**. To provide the protection from any ESD events, the voltage clamping circuit is connected between the distribution networks **55** and **60** to connect the separate power supplies **V**_{sup1} and **V**_{sup2}. The voltage clamping circuit has an N-type impurity diffused to a lightly doped level into the P-type substrate **5** to form the N-wells **10** and **15**. The N-type impurity is diffused to a high concentration level into the N-wells **10** and **15** to form the heavily doped N-regions **29**, **25**, **35**, and **45**. A P-type material is diffused to a high concentration into the N-wells **10** and **15** to form the heavily doped P-regions **30** and **40**. Simultaneously the P-type material is diffused into the

substrate 5 to form the P-region 50. Contact metallurgy is alloyed to the P-

10

15

type region **50** to form a contact that is connected to the ground reference distribution system **75**.

Contact metallurgy is alloyed to the P-type regions 30 and 40 to form contacts that are respectively connected to the distribution networks 55 and 60 for the power supply voltage sources V_{sup1} and V_{sup2}. Contact metallurgy is alloyed to the N-type regions 20 and 25 and to the P-type region 40 to form a contact that serially interconnects the two stages of the voltage clamping circuit. Contact metallurgy is alloyed to the N-type regions 35 and 45 to form contacts that are connected to the distribution network 60 that is connected to the power supply voltage source V_{sup2}.

The diode D₁ 70a is formed at the junction of the P-region 30 and N-well 10 in conjunction with the N-region 20. Similarly, the diodes D₂ 70b, D₃ 70c, and D₄ 70d are formed at the junction of the P-regions 30 and 40 and N-wells 10 and 15 in conjunction respectively with the N-regions 25, 35, and 45. Further the emitter of the vertical PNP transistor 75a is formed by the P-region 30, the base being the N-well 10, and the collector being the P-type substrate 5. Likewise, the emitter of the vertical PNP transistor 75b is formed by the P-region 40, the base being the N-well 15, and the collector being the P-type substrate 5.

20 [0009] Referring now to Fig. 2 for a discussion of the operation of the voltage clamping circuit of the prior art. In this example, the voltage clamping circuit has multiple PNP transistors **75a**, **75b**, ..., **75m**, ..., **75n**

serially connected emitter to base. The emitter of first PNP transistor **75a** is connected to the distribution network **55** of the power supply voltage source V_{sup1} . The base of the last PNP transistor **75n** is connected to the distribution network **60** of the power supply voltage source V_{sup2} . The collectors of the PNP transistors **75a**, **75b**, ..., **75m**, ..., **75n** are connected to the ground reference distribution system **75**. If the voltage level present on the distribution network of the power supply voltage supply V_{sup1} increases to a threshold level greater than the voltage level of the power supply voltage source V_{sup2} , the base-emitter diodes of the PNP transistors **75a**, **75b**, ..., **75m**, ..., **75n** begin to conduct to clamp any voltage difference between the power supply voltage source V_{sup1} and the power supply voltage source V_{sup2} to maintain the threshold level difference between the power supply voltage sources V_{sup1} and V_{sup2} .

[0010] The threshold level is determined by the number of serially connected PNP transistors **75a**, **75b**, ..., **75m**, ..., **75n** and is calculated from the formula:

$$V_t = mV_d - V_o m * m(m-1) * \frac{ln(\beta+1)}{2}$$

where:

Vt is threshold level of the voltage clamping circuit.

15

m is the number of PNP transistors 75a, 75b, ..., 75m, ..., 75n.

 V_d voltage developed across each individual base emitter junction of the PNP transistors **75a**, **75b**, ..., **75m**, ..., **75n**.

Vo is determined by the formula

$$V_0 = \frac{KT}{q}$$

where:

K is Boltzman's constant.

T is the temperature.

q is electrical charge of an electron.

- [0011] It is known that the main cause in a decrease in the breakdown or conduction voltage of during an ESD event is the leakage current from of the base-emitter junction of the PNP transistors 75a, 75b, ..., 75m, ..., 75n. Thus, as the number of PNP transistors 75a, 75b, ..., 75m, ..., 75n increases, the threshold level does not increase concomitantly.
- [0012] Other ESD device structures as illustrated in U.S. Patent 5,674,761 (Chang, et al.), U.S. Patent 5,856,214 (Yu), and U.S. Patent 6,096,584

15

20

(Ellis-Monaghan, et al.) provide ESD devices structures that prevent damage to internal circuitry by preventing excess voltage as applied to input/output pads from damaging internal circuitry.

[0013] Polycrystalline silicon diodes are well known in the art as illustrated by U.S. Patent 4,616,404 (Wang, et al.). Wang, et al. describes a method of making improved lateral polycrystalline silicon diode by treating plasmaetched sidewalls to remove defects. The lateral polycrystalline diode is characterized by low reverse current leakage, a breakdown voltage of at least five volts, and low series resistance permitting high current flow before being limited by saturation. The polycrystalline silicon diode has a polycrystalline silicon block formed on a substrate. The polycrystalline silicon block has a first zone sufficiently doped to provide a first semiconductor type and a second zone sufficiently doped to provide a second semiconductor type. The junction where the two zones are adjoined form a diode.

[0014] Another polycrystalline diode is described in U.S. Patent 6,229,157 (Sandhu). The polycrystalline silicon diode of Sandhu has a relatively improved on-off ratio. The diode is formed in a container in an insulative structure layered on a substrate of an integrated circuit. The container is then partially filled with a polycrystalline silicon material, by methods such as conformal deposition, leaving a generally vertical seam in the middle of the polycrystalline silicon material. An insulative material is deposited in the

seam. The polycrystalline silicon material is appropriately doped and electrical contacts and conductors are added as required. The diode can be coupled to a chalcogenide resistive element to create a chalcogenide memory cell.

- A polycrystalline diode structure that has a high voltage tolerance, which is to be used for mixed-voltage, and mixed signal and analog/digital applications is described in U.S. Patent 6,232,163 and U.S. Patent 6,015,993 (both to Voldman, et al.). The diode includes a polycrystalline silicon gate structure on at least one dielectric film layer on a semiconductor (silicon) layer or body. A well or an implanted area is formed in a bulk semiconductor substrate or in a surface silicon layer on an SOI wafer. A block mask is formed over the gate structure when defining the depleted-polycrystalline silicon gate silicon diode to form low series resistance diode implants, preventing over-doping the film.
- 15 [0016] An application of polycrystalline silicon diodes is shown in "On-Chip ESD Protection Design by Using Polysilicon Diodes in CMOS Process," Ker et al., IEEE Journal Of Solid-State Circuits, IEEE, New York, NY, VOL. 36, NO. 4, April 2001, pp. 676-686 and "On-Chip ESD Protection Design for GHz RF Integrated Circuits by Using Polycrystalline silicon Diodes in sub-quarter-micron CMOS Process," Chang and Ker, Proceedings 2000 Electrical Overstress and Electrostatic Discharge Symposium, IEEE, New York, NY, 2000, pp. 3A 4.1-3A 4.10. These papers describe applications

10

15

20

using polycrystalline silicon diodes as the ESD clamp devices in CMOS process. Different process factors are experimentally evaluated to find the suitable doping concentration for optimizing the polycrystalline silicon diodes for both on-chip ESD protection design and the application requirements of the smart-card IC's.

applications is described in "Design of the Turn-On Efficient Power-Rail ESD Clamp Circuit with Stacked Polysilicon Diodes," Ker and Chen, Proceeding of the 2001 International Symposium on Circuits and Systems, IEEE, New York, 2001, pp. IV-758 – IV-761. Ker and Chen detail a novel power-rail ESD clamp circuit design by using stacked polycrystalline silicon diodes to trigger ESD protection device is proposed to achieve excellent on-chip ESD protection. The power-rail ESD clamp circuit employing the polycrystalline silicon diodes as described in Ker and Chen achieves a human body model ESD level has been successfully improved from the original ~200V to become 3Kv.

Summary of the Invention

[0018] An object of this invention is to provide an ESD protection circuit that will protect integrated circuits having multiple power supply voltage sources from damage when an ESD event causes excessive differential voltages between the multiple separate power supply voltage sources.

10

15

- [0019] Another object of this invention is to provide an ESD protection circuit having a lateral diode constructed of polycrystalline silicon characterized by consistent turn-on threshold voltage level such that as the number of stage of the ESD protection circuit increase, the turn-on voltage threshold of the ESD protection circuit increase linearly.
- [0020] To accomplish at least one of these objects as well as other objects, an electrostatic discharge circuit that includes a plurality of serially connected polycrystalline silicon diodes formed on a surface of a substrate is connected between a first power supply voltage source and a second power supply voltage source to protect internal integrated circuits from damage due to an electrostatic discharge. Each diode of the plurality of serially connected polycrystalline diodes has a first electrode and a second electrode. The plurality of serially connected polycrystalline diodes has a first diode, which has its first electrode connected to the first power supply voltage source, and a last diode, which has its second electrode connected to the second power supply voltage source.
- [0021] The first electrode of each diode of the plurality of serially connected polycrystalline silicon diodes is a first region of polycrystalline silicon being heavily doped with an impurity of a first type. Further, the second electrode of each diode of the plurality of serially connected polycrystalline diodes is a second region of polycrystalline silicon being heavily doped with an impurity of a second type. The second region being adjoined to the first region to

10

15

form an electrical junction. Each diode is formed on a shallow trench isolation formed within the substrate. During formation of each diode a resistor protection oxide formed as an overlay to protect a portion of the first and second regions at the junction.

- [0022] Generally, the first electrode of each polycrystalline silicon diode is defined as cathode and the second electrode of each polycrystalline silicon diode is defined as an anode. To maintain this definition, the impurity of the first type is an N-type impurity having a density of from approximately 10¹⁵ atoms/cm⁻³ to approximately 10²¹ atoms/cm⁻³. The impurity of the second type is a P-type impurity having a density of from approximately 10¹⁵ atoms/cm⁻³ to approximately 10²¹ atoms/cm⁻³.
 - [0023] The width of each of the diodes and the thickness of the polycrystalline silicon diodes and the doping levels of the first and second electrodes of each diode determines the resistivity of the diode and thus the current capacity of the diodes. The preferred thickness of the polycrystalline silicon diodes is preferably from approximately 1000Å to approximately 3000 Å. The width of polycrystalline silicon diodes is preferably from approximately 100μm.
- [0024] The number of the plurality of serially connected polycrystalline silicon diodes of the electrostatic discharge circuit is determined by the formula:

$$n \ge \frac{V_{noise} + \left|Vx1 - Vx2\right|}{V\tau}$$

where:

n is the number serially connected of polycrystalline silicon diodes,

V_{noise} is the maximum voltage level difference allowed to be present on the internal integrated circuits between the first power supply voltage source and the second power supply voltage source,

Vx1 is the magnitude of the first power supply voltage source,

Vx2 is the magnitude of the second power supply voltage source, and

V_T is the threshold voltage of each polycrystalline silicon diodes.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0025] Fig. 1 is a cross sectional view of the structure of an ESD protection circuit of the prior art.

10

- [0026] Fig. 2 is an schematic of an equivalent circuit of the ESD protection circuit of the prior art as described in Fig. 1
- [0027] Fig. 3 is plot of the ESD protection circuit of the prior art illustrating the current through a number of stages of the ESD protection circuit versus the voltage across the ESD protection circuit of the prior art.
- [0028] Fig. 4a is an schematic of an equivalent circuit of the ESD protection circuit of this invention as described in Fig. 4a
- [0029] Fig. 4b is a cross sectional view of the structure of an ESD protection circuit of this invention.
- 10 [0030] Figs. 5a-5o are cross sectional views of a semiconductor substrate illustrating the method of the formation of the polycrystalline silicon diodes as they form the ESD protection circuit of this invention.
- [0031] Figs. 6a-6b are top views of a semiconductor substrate illustrating the method of the formation of the polycrystalline silicon diodes as they form the ESD protection circuit of this invention.
 - [0032] Fig. 7 is plot of the ESD protection circuit of this invention illustrating the current through a number of stages of the ESD protection circuit versus the voltage across the ESD protection circuit of this invention.

20

Detailed Description of the Invention

- The ESD protection circuit of this invention is constructed to provide a path having a low leakage current during normal operation and a path having a consistent turn-on threshold voltage level such that as the number of stages or diodes of the ESD protection circuit increases, the turn-on threshold voltage level increases linearly. The ESD protection circuit consists of a string of serially connected polycrystalline silicon diodes D₁, D₂, D₂, ..., D_{n-1}, D_n coupled between the interconnection networks of a two separate power supply voltage sources V_{sup1} and V_{sup2} as shown in Fig. 4a.
- polycrystalline silicon diodes of this invention. Regions of shallow trench isolation 110a 110b are formed in the P-type substrate 105. Even though multiple regions of shallow trench isolation 110a 110b are shown, the serially connected polycrystalline silicon diodes maybe formed on a single region of shallow trench isolation 110a 110b.
 - [0035] Segments of polycrystalline silicon 115a and 115b are formed on the surface of each region of STI 100a and 110b. The segments of polycrystalline silicon 115a and 115b have regions 120a and 120b heavily doped with a P-type material to form an anode of the polycrystalline silicon diodes D₁, D₂, D₃, ..., D_{n-1}, D_n. The regions 125a and 125b of the segments of the polycrystalline silicon 115a and 115b are likewise heavily doped with an N-type material to form the cathodes of the polycrystalline

15

20

silicon diodes D_1 , D_2 , D_3 , ..., D_{n-1} , D_n . Each of the regions 120a and 120b, and the regions 125a and 125b have metallic alloy salicides formed on their surfaces to create contacts that form connections to the metal layers 135, 140, 145, and 150. The metal connection 135 is connected to the distribution network 155 of the power supply voltage source V_{sup1} . The metal connections 140 and 145 provide the connections of the cathodes to the anodes to serially connect the polycrystalline silicon diodes D_1 , D_2 , D_3 , ..., D_{n-1} , D_n . The cathode of the last diode is coupled by the metal connection 150 to the distribution network 160 of the power supply voltage source V_{sup2} .

[0036] A resistor protective oxide (RPO) is formed on the surface of each segment of the polycrystalline silicon 115a and 115b to protect each segment of the polycrystalline silicon 115a and 115b, while allowing the metal to allow with the polycrystalline silicon 115a and 115b during creation of the contacts and the metal layers 135, 140, 145, and 150.

[0037] Refer now to Figs 5a-5o and Figs. 6a-6b for a discussion of the method for the fabrication of the ESD protection circuit of this invention.

The method begins with the depositing of a silicon nitride (Si_xN_y) layer 210 and a thick oxide layer 215 on a lightly doped P-type substrate 205 to form a masking. Openings 220 are formed in the silicon nitride (Si_xN_y) layer 210 and a field oxide layer 215 in locations that are to form the regions of shallow trench isolation 110a and 110b of Fig. 4b. The P-type silicon

15

20

substrate 205 is then etched in the openings 220 to form the shallow trenches 225 in the surface of the P-type substrate 205. Each of the trenches 225 are then lined with a with an insulation layer 230 and then further filled with an insulation material 235 such as silicon dioxide to form the shallow trench isolation.

The silicon nitride (Si_xN_y) layer **210** and the thick oxide layer **215** are removed generally by a chemical-mechanical planarization (CMP) that is well known in the art. A layer of polycrystalline silicon **240** is deposited on the surface of the P-type substrate **205** with a masking layer **245** being formed on the layer of polycrystalline silicon **240**. Blocking areas **250** are formed in the masking layer **245** to define the locations of the segments of the polycrystalline silicon **115a** and **115b** of Fig. 4b.

The layer of polycrystalline silicon 240 is then etched to form the segments of the polycrystalline silicon 255a, 255b, 255c, and 255d. A masking layer 260 is then formed on the surface of the P-type substrate 205 and the segments of polycrystalline silicon 255a, 255b, 255c, and 255d. Openings 265 are formed in the masking layer 260. A P-type acceptor impurity 275 such as boron, gallium, or indium is diffused through the openings 265 into the segments of polycrystalline silicon 255a, 255b, 255c, and 255d to form the P-type anodes 257a, 257b, 257c, and 257d of the polycrystalline silicon diodes. The masking layer 260 is then removed and the masking layer 280 is then formed on the surface of the P-type

15

20

substrate 205 and the segments of polycrystalline silicon 255a, 255b, 255c, and 255d. Openings 285 are formed in the masking layer 260. A N-type donor impurity 290 such as antimony, phosphorus, or arsenic is diffused through the openings 285 into the segments of polycrystalline silicon 255a, 255b, 255c, and 255d to form the N-type cathodes 259a, 259b, 259c, and 259d of the polycrystalline silicon diodes.

- The masking layer 280 is removed and the insulative material 295 such as silicon dioxide is deposited upon the surface of the P-type substrate 205 and the segments of polycrystalline silicon 255a, 255b, 255c, and 255d that now form the polycrystalline silicon diodes. Blocking areas 305 are formed in the masking layer 300 to protect the desired regions of the insulative material 295. The masking layer 300 is removed and the insulative layer 300 is etched to form the resistor protective oxide (RPO) 295a, 295b, 295c, and 295d and the field insulation areas 290.
- [0041] A metal such as titanium is deposited and alloyed to the segments of polycrystalline silicon 255a, 255b, 255c, and 255d in the exposed areas to form the contacts 312a, 312b, 312c, and 312d on the P-type regions 257a, 257b, 257c, and 257d and the contacts 314a, 314b, 314c, and 314d on the N-type regions 259a, 259b, 259c, and 259d. During the deposition of the metal 310, the resistor protective oxide 295a, 295b, 295c, and 295d protects the junction of the adjoined P-type regions 257a, 257b, 257c, and 257d and N-type regions 259a, 259b, 259c, and 259d.

10

15

20

[0042] The masking layer 325 is deposited on the metal 310 and the opening 320 are formed to demarcate the connections of the ESD protection circuit of this invention. The exposed metal 325 is etched to remove the excess so as to form the metal traces 335, 340, 345, 350, 365 to complete the interconnection of the ESD protection circuit. The anode of the diode D₁ is connected through the metal trace to the distribution network **355** to the power supply voltage source **V**_{sup1}. The cathode of the diode D₁ is connected to the anode of the diode D₂ by the metal trace 340. The cathode of the diode D₂ is connected to the anode of the diode D₃ by the metal trace 345. The cathode of the diode D₃ is connected to the anode of the diode D_4 by the metal trace 350. The cathode of the diode D_4 is connected to the distribution network 360 of the power supply voltage source V_{sup2} by the metal trace 365. This structure as described forms the serially connected string of diodes D₁, D₂, D₃, D₄ between the power supply voltage source V_{sup1} and the power supply voltage source V_{sup2} .

The width W (Fig. 6a) of the diodes and the thickness h (Fig. 5j) of the segments of polycrystalline silicon 255a, 255b, 255c, and 255d and the doping levels of the P-type regions 257a, 257b, 257c, and 257d and N-type regions 259a, 259b, 259c, and 259d determine the resistivity of the diode and thus the current capacity of the diodes D₁, D₂, D₃, D₄. The preferred doping concentration levels for the P-type regions 257a, 257b, 257c, and 257d are from approximately 10¹⁵ atoms/cm⁻³ to approximately 10²¹ atoms/cm⁻³. The preferred doping concentration levels for the N-type

regions 259a, 259b, 259c, and 259d are from approximately 10¹⁵ atoms/cm⁻³ to approximately 10²¹ atoms/cm⁻³. The preferred thickness h of the segments of polycrystalline silicon 255a, 255b, 255c,and 255d is from approximately 1000Å to approximately 3000 Å. The width W of the segments of polycrystalline silicon 255a, 255b, 255c,and 255d are preferably from approximately 0.5μm to approximately 100μm.

[0044] Refer now to Figs. 3 and 7 to compare the current through the ESD protection circuit of the prior art as illustrated in Fig. 1 and the ESD protection circuit of this invention as illustrated in Fig. 4b. The comparison of the voltage level across the ESD protection circuits of the prior art and of this invention having one, five and seven stages is shown in Table 1

	Prior Art (Fig. 1)	This invention (Fig. 4b)
Number of Stages/Circuit	Voltage @ 1μa	Voltage @ 1μa
1 Stage	0.65V	0.60
5 Stages	2.7V	2.9V
7 Stages	3.2V	4.0V

Table 1

[0045] Further, when the slopes of the plots for the single stage **80**, five stages **85**, and seven stages **90** of the prior art are compared with the slopes of the single stage **380**, five stages **385**, and seven stages **390** of this invention, it becomes apparent that the threshold voltage of the ESD

protection circuit of the prior art is not linear as the number of stages is increased. However, the threshold voltage of the ESD protection circuit of this invention is more nearly linear with the increase in the number of stages or diodes in the string.

The number of the serially connected polycrystalline silicon diodes

D₁, D₂, D₃, ..., D_{n-1}, D_n of Fig. 4b included in the electrostatic discharge circuit of this invention is determined by the amount of noise or change beyond the difference between the voltage levels of the power supply voltage source V_{sup1} and the power supply voltage source V_{sup2} that can be tolerated by the internal integrated circuits and can be calculated by the formula:

$$n \ge \frac{V_{noise} + \left| Vx1 - Vx2 \right|}{V\tau}$$

where:

n is the number serially connected of polycrystalline silicon diodes,

V_{noise} is the maximum voltage level difference allowed to be present on the internal integrated circuits between the first power supply voltage source and the second power supply voltage source,

20

15

Vx1 is the magnitude of the first power supply voltage source V_{sup1} ,

 $\mbox{\bf Vx2}$ is the magnitude of the second power supply voltage source $\mbox{\bf V}_{sup2},$ and

V_T is the threshold voltage of each polycrystalline silicon diodes.

[0047] While this invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to the preferred embodiments thereof, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes in form and details may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. In particular the doping types and concentrations are shown as having particular polarities. It is in keeping with the intent of this invention that the doping types and concentrations may be varied by procedures and methods known in the art. In particular, the shallow trench isolation 110a 110b of Fig. 4 maybe a field oxide region.

[0048] The invention claimed is: